

The Children of Chinatown

An Account of a Queer Part of New York at School.

According to an unofficial census the children of Chinatown number about 100. This census was taken in shops, at the schools and with the help of the stray Chinese guides who are always ready to give information and lead strangers to the different points of interest in that peculiar part of downtown Manhattan.

There are 100 children include not only the pure-blooded Chinese, but also those of mixed parentage—Irish and Chinese, Italian and Chinese or American and Chinese. It is interesting to study the combinations of race. The American and Irish traits in nearly every instance predominate over the Chinese, while with the children of Italian and Chinese parents the similarity of complexion and coloring of hair and eyes make it difficult to distinguish them from the pure-blooded Chinese.

It is not an easy matter to find the children of Chinatown. The time and place must be chosen well. They do not run wild in the streets like the children in other tenement districts. Especially is this true of the children of pure Chinese blood, who are, as a general thing, carefully housed.

The children of Chinatown are not early risers. They are unlike the American child in this as in many other respects. The saying "Early to bed and early to rise" is without meaning to them.

The Chinese work late and play late, rarely retiring before 1 or 2 o'clock in the morning and sleeping well into the day. The children are not excluded from the work or the play, and consequently are seen in vain for them in the morning hours. They are still in the arms of the Chinese Mother.

Perhaps the best place of all to study

morning hours, the other only in the afternoon.

To the first, one comes by means of a dark stairway rising from a long narrow hall, the type of hall so familiar to the tenement dweller. This stairway leads to an upper room, small and heated to a temperature which creates discomfort on the assertions regarding the tightness of the coal market.

Here about a dozen children may be found, sometimes fourteen, sixteen or even twenty; the number depends merely on the want of growing of the thirst for knowledge, which, even in Chinatown, it seems, is a changeable quality. This kindergarten draws its attendance principally from the mixed races and, in consequence, the morning session is possible.

The room is furnished with only the necessary tables, chairs and blackboards. Queer little figures rise to greet the visitor, moved as by courtesy than curiosity, for in that respect, as in many others, one can trace no distinction from their Anglo-Saxon contemporaries.

The teacher explains them by name, with a little bit of biography tucked on here and there. You are introduced to Wing Quong, Bessie Wing, Kay Guey, Ka Son and the "also rans."

Wing Quong engages special interest. Wing is to be sent to China at the request of relatives, to remain until he is 15. He is now about 7 and looks serious enough at the prospect of the coming separation from his relatives and school chums.

The first question the American woman visitor is sure to ask relates, of course, to

apparently, on charitable impulses rather than set ideas.

But the head covering shows a diversity of opinion. The popular covering is the naval cap with a wide visor and lots of gilt braid twisted about it. The boy wears this in school and out. He cannot be detached from his one adornment. Sometimes a boy wears a black skull cap fitted tight over

slavery, to a limited extent, exists, there seems little doubt.

But if one has a keen sense of humor, as well as of pathos, one should visit the afternoon school. Here the Chinese children come in costume and there are many interesting sights for the student of human nature.

This schoolroom opens directly from Mot



"I AIN'T GOT NO BEST CLOTHES."

his head, under which the cue may be twisted if he be a pure Chinese; if he is not, of course, the cue is eliminated from his makeup.

There are mysteries in Chinatown—many of them. The floor above the kindergarten holds one, so it is said. What is it? Only a slave-girl, and at the word "slave" the informant's voice drops to a melodramatic whisper.

If it were only possible to see her. But apparently the slave-girl is kept out of sight of the chance visitor. She is only 11, is owned by the family with which she lives, and has to do all sorts of menial work, telling into the early morning hours.

It is impossible to obtain specific informa-

tion and is on the ground floor. It is decorated with garlands of evergreen and colored papers and is very bright and cheery. When the teacher is not there on time, as



THE MYSTERY OF SLAVE GIRL.

sometimes happens, Annie makes a very good cicerone.

Annie is the oldest pupil and is a fairly tall, pleasant-looking girl of 10. She confides that her parentage is mixed and that her mother is Irish. Her last name is Lee in deference to her father. The children of mixed parentage have usually two names, the first name given by the mother.

From Annie one learns many interesting facts, later corroborated by personal observation. She is bright, cheerful and happy except when she talks of the Chinese New Year and tells of the beautiful costumes worn by the children who at this time are gowning in their native robes. One she particularly admires for its color scheme has made a vivid impression. It is of magenta and green, with red shoes and pink stockings.

When asked as to her own costume, she answers in her cheerfulness for a minute and says, "I ain't got no best clothes." Think of the pathos of a Chinese New Year without new clothes!

Annie points with pride to the work of the children as exhibited on the wall.



IN THE DARK HALLWAY.

tion in regard to this so-called slave traffic. In fact, there is a great deal of dumbness in Chinatown in regard to personal matters. Those who know won't tell, and those who are willing to tell don't know. But that

There are some cardboard designs done in colored silk. While she is showing them Louie, one of the big mouth and bulging ears, comes to her aid. He calls attention particularly to a design which represents a balance with a square marked "Soul" on one side of the scales and on the other a square marked "World." This has made a deep impression on Louie. He hasn't quite made out what it means.

But there are others. Annie inclines to a silk outlined book with "Bible" written across it, on the top of which rests a lighted lamp of the Oriental type. This, Annie says, is a report, by which description she for the first time suggests her Chinese lineage.

The afternoon session opens with prayer in Chinese and some hymns are sung, sometimes in Chinese, sometimes in English. The prayer and the occasional hymn are the only Chinese spoken in the school.

It is a source of great grief to the Chinese inhabitants that there is no place where the children can learn their own language, but no such school exists in Chinatown.

It is during the catechism that attention is directed toward Guy. Guy has all the hall marks of Li Hung Chang. He is very small for his age, as most of the children are, and wears immense goggles whose



HALF AND HALF.

rims are black and heavy and whose glasses are about twice the usual size. He sports a naval cap with a great deal of gold braid, which is a little large for his head and rests placidly on his outstretched ears. A big knapsack of shiny leather is hung over his shoulder and almost obscures the greater part of his body from observation.

He is there for learning. It is written all over his untanned face so that she who came many miles from the main issue by any errand curiosity. He answers without a moment's hesitation such soul-searching questions as "Who is God?" "Why do you love Jesus?" to his own satisfaction at least.

Charlie, on the contrary, is a musically inclined. He is of the pure Chinese type, although he has made concessions to the land of his adoption and sports gray corduroys, a shirt waist, and a black skull cap pulled down tight over his head. He has the soft olive tinted complexion and the large luminous eyes of his class, but his mouth—perhaps it is his love of vocal gymnastics—who can say—but when Charlie begins to sing for a time the upper part of his head is a floating island.

While the teacher plays on the piano, Charlie, as if fearful of the strength of his emotions, clings desperately to the edge of the instrument with first one hand, then the other, then with both. He then, swinging his back and forth as high as his head and higher, strenuously, continuously, while a torrent of sound issues from his cavernous mouth, which draws everything in the room while it lasts, and it lasts until he is exhausted.

It is no less of his surroundings. The hymn selected is of the innocuous Wesley class, but with Charlie clinging to the piano it becomes dramatic as a Nibelungen tragedy.

Finally, perspiring and limp, he sinks into a nearby chair and the rest of the children resume the catechism lesson. Discipline has its moments of relaxation, marked by the sudden falling to the floor of half a dozen children who begin an excited game of tag until aroused and restored to sitting postures.

The bells of the school are little On Gook, who comes strolling placidly in, with that

indifference of gesture and movement which separates the children of Chinatown from their American associates. One can not imagine On Gook ever hurrying. Surely she will glide through life with the same Oriental grace, placid, serene, a mere looker-on rather than an active participant in the strenuous life which throbs about the few streets of Chinatown.

On Gook is a dainty little lady. She has on her native dress for which one mentally thanks the good taste or laziness of her mother. Her trowsers, while long, have a broad band of heliotrope to the knees.

Her blouse is dark green, braided with black; her hair is cut in a fringe and falls almost to her eyebrows in front. It is combed to a fringe in the back, the middle portion of the hair allowed to grow



ON GOOK, A LITTLE FLOWER OF CHINATOWN.

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